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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHENGDU 000288

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST TIBET: TRAVELING WITH THE PARTY'S MINDERS

REF: A. CHENGDU 287

[1](#)B. 07 CHENGDU 239

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CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A week spent in the Bayi capital of Linzhi Prefecture in China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) with local authorities and "Help Tibet Cadres" yielded a number of insights on prevailing attitudes about government policies in the region and the personalities involved. The array of sensitivities and insensitivities displayed by the officials ConGenOff encountered illustrated the continued "comprehension gap" between ethnic Hans and Tibetans. The long-time presence of Han officials in this southeastern region of the TAR, however, combined with the growing Chinese language skills of the local population in some areas, may be making the role of ethnic Tibetan cadres as intermediaries less important to government authorities. End Summary.

The Cast: Local Han, Tibetan Officials and Help Tibet Cadres

[1](#)2. (C) As expected, ConGenOff was closely accompanied by a wide array of government representatives during a visit in late November to Linzhi Prefecture in southeast TAR. Official handlers went with ConGenOff and LES (ethnic Tibetan) to all visit sites and took all meals with us. We were, however, at least "somewhat" left alone for walks around Bayi during the evenings. This report sketches brief portraits of "Help Tibet Cadres," ethnic Han officials sent from other parts of China to assist in the administration of the TAR, and other local officials we encountered

From Fuzhou: Linzhi Prefecture Secretary-General Xie

[1](#)3. (C) Prefecture Secretary-General Xie Yaxing, a "Help Tibet Cadre" from near Fuzhou in the coastal province of Fujian, was nearing the end of this three-year assignment in Linzhi. Xie was very proud of the new buildings put up over the last few years by the Fujian Help Tibet Cadres in Bayi Township. One was a four-story exhibition center finished in 2007 that appeared to be little used. According to Xie, as the upper floors area still empty, he intends to get investors from Fujian to spend one million RMB to put in an exercise center. ConGenOff politely turned aside, to Xie's frustration, insistent requests to do trade promotion work for Linzhi Prefecture. At a subsequent meeting at the Linzhi Employment Office, Xie complained about ConGenOff's questions on the economic situation of Tibetans and the level of assistance being providing them.

He asserted, "the Tibetans have lots of money, they have their yaks and their land. The people who need help are the poor Han people in the city"

14. (C) During a subsequent banquet, Xie became so abusive in his attempts to force alcohol on us that ConGenOff had to tell one of our handlers that such bullying was unacceptable and could precipitate us walking out. The TAR Foreign Affairs Office representative on hand replied apologetically that, "no central government official would act like that," and promised to talk with Xie. As he tried to force alcohol on us, Xie claimed that heavy drinking at banquets is a Tibetan custom. (Comment: Not really true. Many Tibetans have religious scruples against such drinking sessions. Xie's attitude in general appeared reflective of a "Han chauvinism" we have observed before (ref b) that stirs up much Tibetan resentment, but is rarely acknowledged as a problem by the ethnic Han majority. Xie's earlier remark at the Employment Bureau may emanate from the perception that poor local Tibetans can always fall back on their families and communities, while Han migrants who come to Linzhi to find work are dependent upon government support).

"Plateau Han:" Wang Zemin Leads Linzhi Foreign Affairs Bureau

15. (C) Linzhi Prefecture Foreign Affairs official Wang Zemin hails originally from Shanxi Province and settled in Tibet twenty years ago after being stationed there with the People's Liberation Army. He described himself as a "Plateau Han," fully acclimatized to high altitude. According to Wang, he does not like going back home to Shanxi because he finds it barren and the lower altitude makes him feel sleepy. (Note: Lhasa officials have often complained to us that sleepiness at low altitudes is a common experience when plateau-acclimatized people return to low altitude). Wang commented that helping Tibetans to modernize is very difficult since they have a different

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"conception of life" than the Han. He explained: "We try to build new houses for them but they are often happier living in their old houses near their livestock rather than being required to move to a new location."

16. (C) Wang asserted, however, that gathering people together into larger communities is essential for promoting economic development. (Comment: Herders in Linzhi are semi-nomadic and were already somewhat settled before the Chinese government began its official settlement program. A farmer and herder housing program begun in 2006 in Tibetan areas subsidizes new housing and sometimes moves villages to areas more convenient to roads and townships. This appears aimed at gradually shifting the orientation of Tibetan communities away from monasteries, the traditional providers of educational services, medical and pastoral care).

17. (C) Noting the inherent conflict between conserving timber resources and traditional building practices, Wang remarked that both local Tibetans and tourists do not like the fact that many new houses in Linzhi have metal roofs instead of more traditional and beautiful wooden roofs. (Comment: Wang appeared more calm and attentive to details to make meetings go smoothly than the more short-term "Help Tibet Cadres" we encountered. Having spent six-months in California, Wang also understood English relatively well. According to one local observer, such more sophisticated and educated Han cadres who live permanently on the Plateau are becoming more common in some areas, thus making central government officials less dependent upon ethnic Tibetan cadres).

FAO Tibetan Cadre

18. (C) One Linzhi FAO cadre (strictly protect), an ethnic Tibetan, was an elementary school teacher in rural Linzhi for two years before getting a job with the Linzhi Prefecture

government. She told ConGenOff that many elderly Tibetans in Linzhi would like religious sites such as stupas to be built in Bayi Township but that the government will not permit it. She said that, as her own parents would not live in Bayi Township because it does not have any temples or stupas, her family bought a home in Lhasa. (Comment: Circumambulation of holy sites is a daily act of devotion for many Tibetans, including retired government and Party officials who need pay less heed to the Communist Party's official promotion of atheism within its ranks).

Tibetan Police Officer Zhashi Dandrup

¶9. (C) Zhashi Dandrup, who accompanied ConGenOff throughout the visit, is head of the Linzhi Prefecture Public Security Bureau's Foreign Affairs Office ("shewai ke"). Although he did not identify himself to us as such, ConGenOff overheard him say it to an official at the Linzhi Airport upon our departure. Zhashi Dandrup did tell us, however, he had served at the PRC Embassy in Canberra and East Timor. He described how rampant crime made securing the PRC Embassy in East Timor very difficult. ConGenOff also overheard Zhashsi Dandrup discuss with TAR FAO official Wu Yingjie (see below) how many developing country embassies in Beijing cannot pay their electric and water bills and that the PRC government has to regularly bail them out. Curiously, in his conversations with a fellow Tibetan FAO cadre (see previous paragraph), Zhashi Dandrup always spoke to her in Tibetan while she always answered him in Mandarin Chinese. Zhashi Dandrup speaks fair English.

Help Tibet Cadre and TAR FAO Officer Wu Yingjie

¶10. (C) TAR foreign affairs official Wu Yingjie, a "Help Tibet Cadre" assigned to the Foreign Affairs Office in Lhasa a year ago, previously served in the Chinese Consulate in Mumbai, India as an office manager. He said about that assignment, "I was looking for an easy job." Wu expects to begin an assignment at the PRC Consulate in San Francisco in 2009. As he did during a previous ConGen visit to the TAR, Wu came off as a relatively uniformed apparatchik (see ref b). He accused ConGenOff of having outdated views about the PRC and did not take it well when ConGenOff cited recent articles by prominent Chinese scholars and the Communist Party publication "Fortnightly" to back up his points. Early in the trip, while crossing a new bridge from Bayi Township, ConGenOff pointed out a dangerous stretch of a new bridge where a bare broken rebar threatened to destroy tires on a section of the roadway and recommended that local officials be informed. Wu observed in a low voice to the driver, however, that as a central government official "he dares not bring up such problems with local officials". Wu also told ConGenOff he finds the Khampa, Tibetans who currently live in

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the eastern TAR and western Sichuan Province and take great pride in their warrior traditions, to be "very frightening" and physically imposing. Wu has a six-year-old son enrolled in an international boarding school in Beijing.

Surveillance

¶11. (C) ConGenOff's FAO vehicle was followed by a car of apparent security minders throughout the trip that hovered about 80 yards away during all site visits while trying conspicuously to be inconspicuous. The minders also followed at a considerable distance during evening walkabouts in Bayi Township. Two of these minders stayed at our hotel, the Linzhi Binguan that is adjacent to a small military base ("bingzhan") and a military hospital. A public security van followed when ConGenOff visited a middle school and a high school.

Farewell Discussion Topic: Taiwan

¶12. (C) At a farewell banquet, local officials and TAR FAO handlers displayed a somewhat less aggressive tone than in some of the earlier meetings. Xie talked about his home in the Fuzhou area and said that foreign influences in the 19th century were partly responsible for the talented people that emerged from his hometown. He stressed that the quality of officials in China is getting better generation-by-generation. With respect to Taiwan, Xie and ConGenOff's FAO handlers asserted that Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo both made great contributions to the development of Taiwan. TAR FAO minder Wu commented, after trotting out the canard that Taiwan had developed rapidly because Chiang Kai-shek had taken China's gold, "in China, we are re-evaluating the contributions of the KMT to the development of Taiwan."

Comments

¶13. (C) Linzhi Prefecture "Plateau Han" cadre Wang was the most professional of the officials among the group that remained glued to ConGenOff throughout the visit. While having such relatively skilled cadres permanently on the ground in Tibetan regions promotes overall political control, it sometimes produces a more nuanced outcome. For example, during a Consulate visit to Linzhi in late 2006, one ethnic Han FAO official, who was born and raised in the TAR to military parents, told us he was married to a Tibetan woman and had converted to Buddhism. He described how he and other Han officials were "rejecting old family homes" in China and "living happily" on the Plateau.

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